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"Nothing so Unmilitary": Examining How Uniforms Influence Love in Pride and Prejudice

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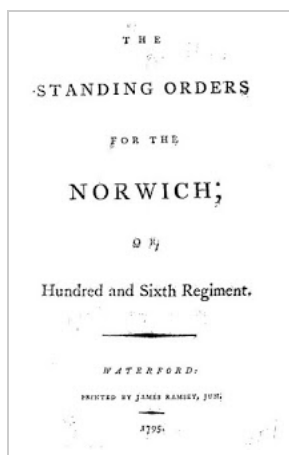
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Pride and Prejudice: The Student Blog

Thursday, March 28, 2013

"Nothing so Unmilitary": Examining How Uniforms Influence Love in Pride and Prejudice

Soldiers in Regency England had the bad reputations of being some of the most inveterate rakes of the time, settling in towns with their companies and seducing the young daughters in the area. In Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, it is interesting that one of the most attractive men is a soldier, Mr. Wickham. When he gathers at parties he is the center of attention, and certainly catches Elizabeth Bennet's eye. When he is first introduced, Austen writes, "His appearance was greatly in his favour; he had all the best part of beauty, a fine countenance, a good figure, and very pleasing address" (111). Part of the attraction to Wickham could be attributed to the uniform he would be wearing that would establish him as a man of action and honor in the King's army. However, earlier in the same paragraph as the previous quote, of Wickham it is said, "the young man wanted only regimentals to make him completely charming" (111) with regimentals being defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "a military or regimental uniform." He was not wearing his uniform when he met the Bennet sisters, which could set him off as someone of a rebellious attitude towards regulations. Of course, soldiers were expected to keep their uniforms on at all times to maintain a sense of professionalism, and these accoutrements were to be kept in tip-top shape.



A selection from *The standing orders for the Norwich; or, Hundred and Sixth Regiment* by the British Army says as such in the manual to be given to officers who were stationed throughout England. It explains in the following passage in explicit detail how officers should be presented to the public and in exacting detail what to not wear with their uniform: Nothing is so unmilitary as seeing the Officers walk about in plain Clothes, and it is therefore absolutely forbid by his Majesty's Orders; nor must they, on any Account, wear any Waistcoat and Breeches with their Uniform but white Cloth, Kersheymere, or Leathern Breeches, with regimental Buttons, made in the regimental Pattern, viz Waistcoat cut round and single breasted, no Colour appearing; the Breeches to buckle at the Knee. (Great Britain Army) With this new perspective from the primary source of the time, it makes the relationship (some may even label it a courtship) between Elizabeth and Mr. Wickham even more scandalous, as he was not only a soldier who had come into town and spread negative rumors about Mr. Darcy, but he is also a soldier who disregards dress regulations. This makes Mrs. Gardiner's advice to Lizzy against Mr. Wickham more sensible, Lydia's marriage to him more ill-advised, and the fact that Mrs. Bennet so approved of him more unbelievable. While gambling and drinking could be seen as entertainments everyone indulges in from time to time, Wickham's snub at military parameters would be more officially punishable. Therefore, Lizzy's attraction to the "bad boy" of the redcoat company in town further shows her lack of good sense, and makes her pride of her logical attitude seem more ridiculous than previously considered. With this new reading of the text, it calls into question whether Lizzy is a trustworthy protagonist at any time regarding romance, or whether she lets her

About

A blog site featuring original research by undergraduate students at Wright State University enrolled in Crystal B. Lal's *Pride and Prejudice* (Spring 2011).

We hope you enjoy reading about the historical contexts surrounding the famous novel. And be sure to participate in CELIA's Bicentennial events on October 2013. Click [here](#) for more information.

Blog Archive

- ▼ 2013 (26)
 - April (6)
 - ▼ March (19)
 - Inactivity of the Inhabitants of Hertfordshire
 - "Nothing so Unmilitary": Examining How Uniforms Influence Love in *Pride and Prejudice*
 - The Physic or Exotic Garden
 - I Never in My Life Saw Anything More Elegant than ...
 - Why Will Thou Bind Thy Love's Brow?
 - "But the clothes, the wedding clothes!": Fashionable ...
 - "Dancing is of More Importance to a Gentleman Than ...
 - There Are But Few Things Which Can Afford Us Great ...
 - I'll tune my pipe to playful notes ... And hail ...
 - Life is Really Too Short: Was Time with Regency ...
 - The Most Elegant Collateral Embellishment of Taste ...
 - The Importance of Practice
 - "From Every Window There Were Beauties to Be Seen" ...
 - Attract Notice by the Copiousness of His Talk ...
 - Thus Does Gaming Harden the Heart and Swallow up E ...
 - "Harry Will be the Gentleman The Nature of Men ...
 - Pride, My Dear
 - These Works of Fancy
 - She Heard Him With A Visible Emotion
- February (1)

emotions rule over any amount of good sense she could have.



Posted by [Lindsey Puterbaugh](#) at 11:18 AM

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